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STAR WARS™
DOCTOR APHRA

THE CATASTROPHE CON
Part VI

Doctor Aphra's greed for an ancient lightsaber guarded by a swarm of Force-powered hookspores has doomed Accresker Jail! Under Imperial interrogation, she has revealed the biohazard in an attempt to keep her darkest secret safe: knowledge of Darth Vader's plot to supplant the Emperor.

Fearing contagion, the Empire has fled and abandoned the jail on a collision course with a nearby planet. Aphra was able to cut a deal with vigilante Tam Posla for an escape shuttle (by delivering into Tam's custody the shape-shifter Lopset disguised as wanted criminal Cornelius Evazan).

But the murderous droids Triple-Zero and Beetee-One have dashed Aphra's latest escape attempt. And Darth Vader himself has finally arrived to silence Aphra once and for all. Of course she may have one final, desperate gamble up her sleeve....

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Accresker Jail.
"HE WON'T STOP. YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THAT. HE WON'T TIRE. HE WON'T FORGIVE. HE WON'T FORGET.
"HE DOESN'T KNOW HOW."
AAAAAAH--!

BUT BOR IFRIEM HERE? HE CAN READ MINDS, TOLVAN. HE CAN CHANGE MINDS--AND HE CAN WIPE THEM.
I HAVE TO FORGET EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT VADER AND HIS PLANS.
...
"EVEN THEN? CHANCES ARE IT WON'T SAVE ME.
"HE DOESN'T DO LOOSE ENDS."
B-BUT--IT'S THE ONLY WAY TO STOP HIM DELVING. PURGING. SEARCHING FOR EVERYONE I COULD EVER HAVE TOLD HIS SECRET.
EVERYONE I--I LIKE.
...NO. APHRA. NO!
THERE'S STILL A CHANCE!
THAT LITTLE DROID THAT NEARLY KILLED US--I-IT'S STILL OUT THERE! IT'LL SLOW HIM DOWN...
...P-PERHAPS EVEN STOP HIM!
SIR. C'MON.
YOU KNOW IT WON'T.
YOU.
BLEEP?
...
FINE. I KNOW IT WON'T. B-BUT YOU'RE WRONG.
THERE IS ANOTHER WAY.

SKREEE...
WIPE MY MIND INSTEAD.
WHAT?

VADER'S ONLY HERE BECAUSE OF ME. M-MAKE ME FORGET YOU. NO MORE LEADS TO FOLLOW. NOBODY TO BLAME.
BUT... WHY WOULD YOU D--
=TT= SLOPPY. YOU KNOW WHY.
BECAUSE I LOVE YOU.
Y-YOU... YOU L--
AND IT'S RUINED MY LIFE.
STOP THINKING ABOUT IT AND DO IT, YOU DAMN COWARD.
THAT'S AN ORDER.
BUT--BUT IT'S--IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE. EVEN IF I WANTED TO, IT'S...
LOOK, HE ALREADY SUSPECTED I SURVIVED EXECUTION! YOU CONFIRMED IT WHEN YOU CALLED HIM. AN AMNESIAC INFORMANT WON'T GET ME CLEAR!
SERIOUSLY? I'M SACRIFICING MYSELF FOR YOU AND YOU'RE NITPICKING?!
N-NO-- IT'S JUST...

"YOU DON'T KNOW VADER LIKE I DO."
IF...IF I HAVE ANY HOPE OF GETTING OUT OF THIS ALIVE, THEN...
OH, I'M SORRY. I'M SO SORRY...
AAAAH--!
FORGETTING'S NOT ENOUGH...

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I KN-KNOW HER WELL.
SSK
=SOB= DON'T KILL HER. PLEASE DON'T KILL HER...
DOCTOR...
...HA! I KNEW YOU'D BE ALIVE! WE SAW THE WRECKED GETAWAY SHIP OUT THERE!
YOU OKAY? THE HUB DROID FOUND YOU BY HOMING IN ON THE PROXIMITY CHARGE! WHAT'RE YOU WATCHING?
L-LOPSET? WHAT'RE YOU DOING HERE?
HE'S WITH ME.
I, TAM POSLA, DO HEREBY ARREST YOU ON THE AUTHORITY OF THE MILVAYNE JUDICIARY, IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT IS GOOD.
YOU HEARTLESS, LYING, CHEATING, PARTNER-KILLING, FAKE-PRISONER-TRADING SCUM!
WH-WHO... =SNFF=

WHO ARE YOU CALLING HEARTLESS?
VWOMMM

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YOU KNOW, DEAR DOCTOR--OH DO STOP SQUIRTING, YOU SILLY MAN--HE IS, IN FACT, CORRECT ABOUT ONE THING:
YOUR LITTLE PROJECTS DO RATHER TEND TO COME BACK AT YOU. WHAT A RELENTLESS PARADE OF REGRET YOU MUST SUFFER.
...HELLO? DOCTOR? ARE YOU EVEN LISTENING TO ME? YOU KNOW, IT'S DREADFULLY RUDE TO IGNORE PEOPLE.
ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO INTEND TO SOFTLY SCOOP OUT YOUR EYEBALLS. YOU MIGHT AT LEAST HAVE THE DECENCY TO TREMBLE.
=TT= I THOUGHT YOU WERE ABOVE ALL THIS TRAUMATIC SHUT-IN NONSENSE. WHAT ARE YOU WATCHING THERE?
F-FORGETTING WASN'T ENOUGH.
APHRA...APHRA SURVIVED YOUR EXECUTION. SHE HID FROM YOU FOR SO LONG, AND I--I HELPED HER.
I LOVED HER, MY LORD.
B-BUT SHE... OHHH...YOU'VE MET HER. YOU KNOW WHAT SHE'S LIKE.
SHE DOUBLE-CROSSED ME. B-BROKE MY HEART. L-LEFT ME TO DIE. AND SO I...OHHH... P-PLEASE, DON'T MAKE M--
YOU WILL SAY IT.

I MURDERED HER.

I--I DID IT FOR THE *EMPIRE!* I WAS ONLY TRYING TO PROTECT YOUR *SECRET,* MY L--

THWOMP

DO NOT TAKE ME FOR A *FOOL,* CAPTAIN. YOU KNOW ALL BUT *NOTHING* OF MY PLANS.

YOUR FEELINGS *BETRAY* YOU.

R-REVENGE. TH-THAT'S ALL IT WAS. I C-CUT HER THROAT JUST FOR *LEAVING* ME.

A-AND ALL IT *ACHIEVED* WAS *LANDING* ME ON THIS *JUNK HEAP* WITH HER *ASSASSIN DROIDS* ON MY TAIL.

A *TAWDRY* MATTER, THEN. YOU SUMMONED ME ONLY TO SAVE *YOURSELF.*

DISAPPOINTING.

FORGETTING ME WASN'T *ENOUGH.*

YOU ALTERED HER MEMORIES.
SH-SHE VOLUNTEERED. DON'T YOU SEE? H-HE WOULD'VE KILLED HER ANYWAY, AND--AND HE WOULD'VE KEPT COMING FOR ME REGARDLESS.
OH, MY DEAR DOCTOR! A NOBLE SACRIFICE TRANSMUTED INTO A SELFISH NEW START!
AND ALL IT COST WAS THE GUILT-ADDLED DOOM OF A LOVER!
JUST WHEN I WAS STARTING TO THINK I WAS TIRED OF YOU.
OH, DO STOP BLUBBING. IT'S NO PLEASURE TORTURING PEOPLE WHO'RE ALREADY MISERABLE.
AAAOOOOW--!
AND YOU'VE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT YOURSELF. ALWAYS ALONE, ALWAYS BLOODY-HANDED-- BUT ALWAYS ALIVE!
THAT'S THE LIFE YOU CHOSE, DEAR DOCTOR.

"IT'S THE LIFE YOU DESERVE."

WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THE PRISONER, LORD VADER?

ESCORT HER TO MY CHAMBERS FOR FURTHER INTERROGATION.

SHE CARRIES CLASSIFIED INFORMATION, MAJOR. YOU WILL NOT PERMIT HER TO SPEAK A SINGLE W--

SOMETHING IS HERE.

...MY LORD?

TK TK SSSSS SSSS

Force-Imprinted Hookspore Swarm. (Thawing...)

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YEEEEE-HAAAA!

GENERAL SYNDULLA? THIS IS SANA STARROS.
EVACUATION OF REBEL FORCES FROM THE PLANET TIFEREP IS NOW COMPLETE.
NO IDEA WHY THE IMPS PUT A PAUSE ON THE IMPACT, BUT WE FIGURED WE'D USE THE TIME TO OUR ADVANTAGE.
EVEN MANAGED TO COME PICK UP THE VOLT COBRA. YOU CAN EXPECT THE REPAIR BILL REAL SOON.
WHAT ABOUT APHRA?
NO SIGN SO FAR, MA'AM, BUT--
UH--TAN LEADER? YOU GOT INCOMING. SOME SORTA WEIRD RED LIGHT FROM B--
VWWOMMMMM
FUT

VADER.
VA--? DID YOU SAY VADER?
SANA! DO NOT ENGAGE! THAT'S AN ORDER! WE DON'T WANT ANOTHER VROGAS VAS!
DO NOT ENGAGE!
FLY! FLY LIKE THE WIND AND JUST--JUST PRAY--
--PRAY HE'S NOT THERE FOR YOU.
JUSSSSSTICCCCE!
THE FORCE IS LIGHT AND LIGHT IS THE FORCE! THE FORCE IS--
SILENCE.

YOU KNOW NOTHING OF THE FORCE.
YOU ARE AN ECHO. AN URGE WITHOUT WILL.
I--I DESTROY THE DARKNESS!
NO.
YOU BORE IT.
SQUITCH
EXECUTOR-- SEND ANOTHER SHUTTLE. I HAVE WASTED ENOUGH TIME HERE.
DO YOU STILL NEED HOLDING FACILITIES, MY LORD?
UNNECESSARY. THE PRISONER IS LIKELY DEAD.
YOU, UH-- YOU WANT US TO SEND DOWN A SEARCH SQUAD, SIR?

NO. THERE IS A SIMPLER WAY.
DISENGAGE THE TRACTOR EMITTER.
ACCRESKER JAIL WILL CONTINUE ON ITS COURSE.
LET IT FALL.
GENERAL? SANA HERE.
YOU'RE ALIVE?!
GUESS HE WASN'T HERE FOR US, HUH?
LISTEN, WE FOUND APHRA'S PET IMPERIAL, BUT--AH, BLAST IT. WE GOT MOVEMENT. THEY'VE RESTARTED THE DROP.
=SIGH= I'M SORRY, MA'AM--WE'RE OUTTA TIME.

"APHRA'S GONE."

OH--HOW FRIGHTFULLY VEXING. SOME BRUTE HAS DISSECTED MY SHIP.

AAAA--
AAAA--
AAAA!

BEETEE-ONE? BEETEE-ONE, WHERE HAVE YOU GOT TO?

I'M, UH, I'M REAL SORRY, MISTER DROID--

--I SEEN A FEW PARTS LYIN' AROUND.

I THINK YOUR ASTROMECH'S DESTROYED.

BUT POSLA'S SHIP IS STILL FINE BACK HERE, SO IF YOU HURRY WE C--

I BEG YOUR PARDON--I DO SO HATE TO BE ABRUPT--

--BUT PLEASE BELIEVE ME THAT I WILL SHRED YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM UNLESS YOU ANSWER PROMPTLY:

WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU MEAN...

..."DESTROYED"?

ZAP
LOPSET.
Y-YOU SAVED ME. HOW CAN I EVER REPAY Y--
YOMM
≡NGF≡
EH.

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Eight Hours Later.
Nowhere.

HE HAD HIS MAN AFTER ALL.
Doctor Cornelius Evazan. Science Monster.
#$%&.

YOU KNOW, THIS DROID'S QUITE A PIECE OF WORK. I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH SMART BARRIERS TO PREVENT MORAL REASONING.
MIGHT BE THE CLOSEST THERE IS TO PROGRAMMED EVIL.

CALL IT RESEARCH. CALL IT MADNESS. CALL IT ART--IT'S ALL THE SAME TO ME:
I MUST KNOW MORE.

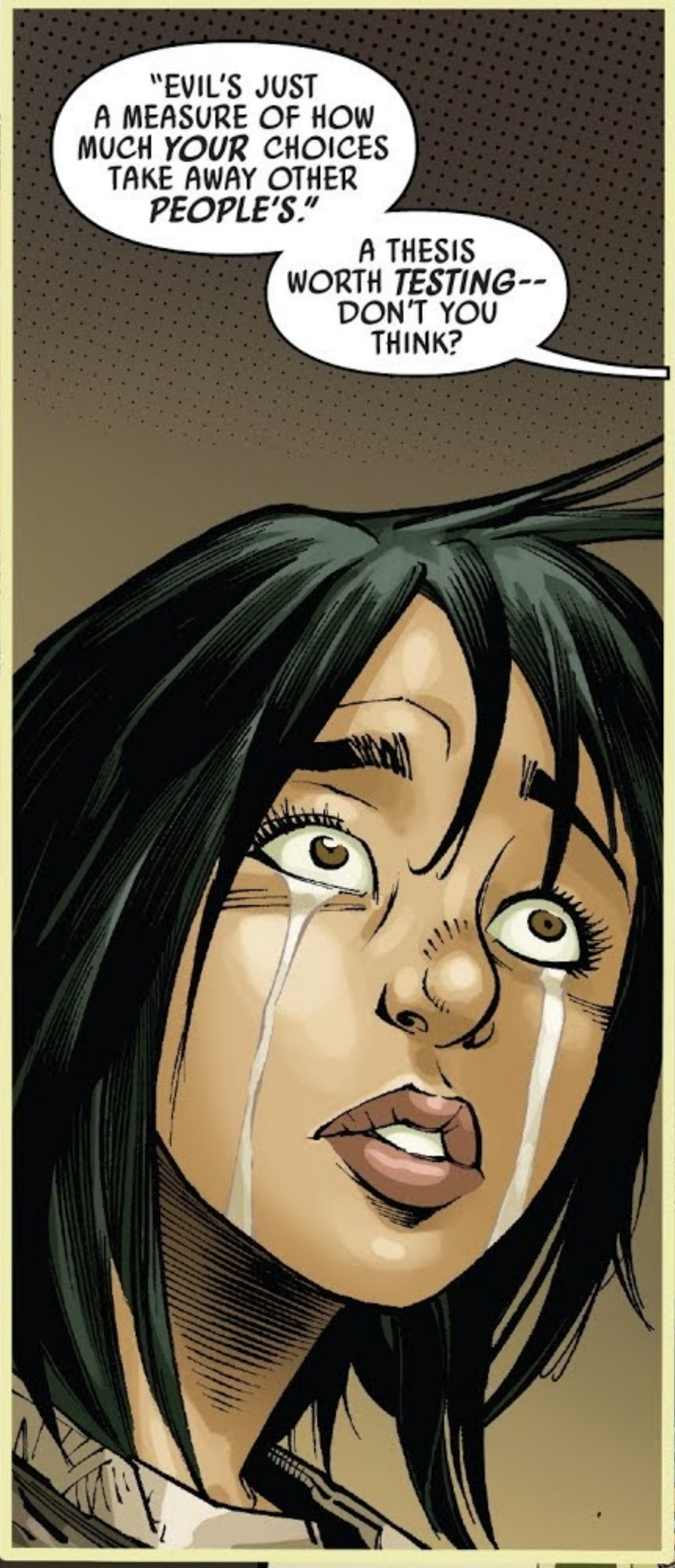
E-ELECTRICIAN. YOU SAID YOU WERE AN ELECTR--
"MULTIDISCIPLINARY," I SAID, THOUGH I PREFER "CYBORGANIC ARTIST."

CASE IN POINT.
KLK!

AHHH. I THINK MY FRIEND IS HERE. TIME TO GO.
CLAAANNGGG

WISH I COULD STAY FOR THE SHOW, BUT I HAVE TOO MUCH BEAUTY TO CREATE--TOO MUCH TO LEARN--TO RISK ANOTHER CAPTURE.
W-W-WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
OHHH, JUST WHAT ANY REASONABLE SCIENTIST WOULD DO.
I CUT OUT MY PROXIMITY BOMB AND PUT IT IN THE EVIL DROID.
IT'S BONDED TO HIS PERSONALITY CORE. ANY TAMPERING? AND BOOM.
EITHER OF YOU DIES? BOOM.
AND BEST OF ALL? IF YOU TWO LOVEBIRDS EVER STRAY MORE THAN TWENTY METERS APART?
BOOM?
B-B-BUT WHY? WHY WOULD YOU DO THIS?!
I TOLD YOU! SCIENCE! ART! TRYING TO--TO TRULY PLUMB THE DEPTHS OF BEAUTY AND UGLINESS.
IS MONSTROSITY INTRINSIC? OR JUST SOMETHING ONE PICKS UP...?

SOMETHING YOU SAID, IN FACT. IT GOT ME THINKING. BIT OF HOMESPUN WISDOM FROM YOUR MOMMA...
HOW DID IT GO, NOW?


"EVIL'S JUST A MEASURE OF HOW MUCH YOUR CHOICES TAKE AWAY OTHER PEOPLE'S."
A THESIS WORTH TESTING-- DON'T YOU THINK?

NUUUURRRRRRT-RK-RK-RK-RK-RK!
COMING, PONDA OLD PAL, COMING. JUST-- FIXING US SOME ENTERTAINMENT FOR WHILE WE LIE LOW.

THE DROIDS EYES'LL TRANSMIT EVERYTHING THEY SEE.
HE'S SET TO AUTO-BOOT IN ONE MINUTE. AND YOU'LL NOTICE HE'S NOT RESTRAINED.
I'M JUST DYING TO KNOW WHAT YOU'LL SAY WHEN HE WAKES UP...?

Y'SEE, DOC, I THOUGHT I WAS A MONSTER. THOUGHT I WROTE THE BOOK ON HORROR AMONG THE STARS. BUT YOU?
YOU MADE ME SEE I GOT A LOT TO LEARN.

WAY I FIGURE IT? YOU AND YOUR FRIEND THERE?

Next: "Worst Among Equals."
DOCTOR APHRA #26!